Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I am sure most of you have been following the devastating story of the terrible floods in Kerala. The trail of destruction caused by the huge floods and the massive landslides is there for everyone to see. The unrelenting relief works are nearing completion. Irrespective of caste, colour, religion or political affiliations, everyone joined hands in the relief operations and faced this calamity head on and brought the much-needed succour to the affected masses. I am grateful to some of our religious who have taken active participation in the ongoing relief works. But, thanks to all of you for your prayers, support and words of comfort at this painful situation for the people of Kerala. However, we are not done yet! Now begins the work of reconstruction and rehabilitation. It is possible that we get put off by the enormity of the situation, but once again by joining hands, we can do it.

Now, continuing my reflection on the theme of the 47th General Chapter: Renewing our Mission: Gratitude, Prophecy and Hope, I would like to dwell on the aspect of GRATITUDE.

Many years ago, I took a course on Reiki healing, a form of alternative medicine developed in Japan by Mikao Usui in the year 1922. Without going into the merits and de-merits of the system, which is outside of the realm of this reflection, I would like to share a simple experience that I had during that course. On the first day, after the classes were over, we went to the dining hall for dinner. After we had been seated, the Reiki Master told us to spend a few minutes looking at the food served on our plate. It was a simple plate of rice and curry. He then asked us a simple question: “Where did the rice on our plate come from?” As we reflected on the question, we soon discovered that the question did not have just one answer, that it came from the kitchen!!! One question led to another.

Yes, certainly, the rice came from the kitchen. But from where did the chef in the kitchen get the raw rice to cook? Of course, it came from the shop. But, where did the shop owner get the rice from? Who went to purchase the rice and how did he/she go to purchase it? By own vehicle or by public transport? Every answer led to another question and the questions could have been asked almost ‘ad infinitum’.

The whole purpose of that exercise was to bring home a simple but profound truth: a simple plate of rice that we enjoyed everyday connected us with so many people and realities! Remembering with gratitude for that bowl of rice helped us to ‘re-member’, become part of this great family of people and realities.

As a Congregation we have reached at this juncture in our history because God has blessed us with a unique Charism and a specific mission. It is also because of the selfless life and ministry of our confrers who have blazed the trail and have moved on from this life – from our founder and his early companions to the last one...
Who has passed on from this world. **Remembering** them with **gratitude** helps us to feel part of this great family and enables us to have a sense of ‘re-membering’ in this beautiful fold! However, as much as we are connected to those who have gone before us, we are also connected to those who are with us still.

Much research has been conducted on the positive value of gratefulness – its spiritual, psychological and social benefits – for those who practice the attitude of gratitude.

Here in the Vice Province of THOM we have arrived at the level of our present growth because of the untiring work of so many missionaries literally coming from around the globe. They came from Argentina to Australia, England, Ireland, Italy, Mexico and the US of America. To all of them we say **THANK YOU, GRAZIE, GRACIAS!**

A true spirit of gratitude also engenders a spirit of thankfulness or rather puts one into a disposition of ‘thanksgiving’— a spirit of giving back, a return of thanks! It is in this spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving that THOM Vice Province has sent many of its young missionaries to the different parts of our Congregation!

In his letter addressed to the Religious for the year of Consecrated life in 2014, Pope Francis set out the aims of the year namely, **to look to the past with gratitude**, to live the present with passion and to embrace the future with hope. He invited each charismatic family to reflect on its origin and history, in order to **thank God** who grants the Church a variety of gifts. Then the Holy Father went on to say that recounting of history was essential to preserve the identity, for strengthening unity as a family and the common sense of belonging.

The theme of the 47th General Chapter is an invitation to all of us to practice grateful living. It is a way of life that calls for a constant mindfulness of blessings, both small and great, so that we may take nothing or no one for granted. Even in this most challenging times of our Congregation when we are faced with diminishment of personnel on one side and lack of material resources to sustain our ministries on the other, living gratefully makes us aware of and being available to the opportunities that present themselves and reach out in care and compassion to others.

May the Lord bless us all with the spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving!

Fraternally,

Paul Cherukoduth, C.P.
Vice Provincial

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**UPDATES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthdays</th>
<th>Feast days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JIFIN 04</td>
<td>Exaltation of the cross 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUGUN 14</td>
<td>Mother of sorrows 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVARAJ 30</td>
<td>St. Vincent Strambi 24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“You came to my rescue!”

It all began with the rains. What started as the usual monsoon in Kerala, last week turned so devastating that almost all the districts in Kerala were badly affected. And to make matters worse the overflowed dams in the State more than 72 of those were opened, and some without proper warning, and it led to a catastrophe that is unprecedented in the history of the State. Hundreds of thousands lost their homes, so many lost their dear ones, their property, their means of livelihood; it literally brought God’s own country, (signature name of Kerala) to a halt. Neither the government nor the people were prepared for something like this. After the initial shock, the government and the people at once rose up to stem the damages.

If the rains and the floods took Keralites by surprise equally surprising and overwhelming was the help pouring in from every part of the State and beyond. Those who immediately plunged into rescue mission was not the army or the government but the local people, who threw caution to the winds and plunged into action to save those people who were stranded and stuck in the flood waters. The police, army, navy personnel along with the help of the fisher folk and countless people; young and old saved thousands of lives. Keralites stood as one family!

We the Passionist community in Cochin, tried to do our bit to help the flood affected people in our little ways. Our Ashram, under the supervision of our Superior and community became overnight a collection and distribution centre for materials to be transported to relief centres and flood affected homes. Our Provincial, Fr. Paul, who himself was stranded in Shoranur due to the unexpected rains and floods, called up and offered all support, and when he came down to Cochin brought many supplies for the flood victims. More than 5 loads of clothes old and new were distributed to relief camps. We could also deliver more than thousands of food packets to the flood victims.

With the assistance and generosity of the people who come to our Church, we also distributed medicines, sanitary napkins, inner wears for men and women, clothes, baby foods, cleaning materials- like bleaching powder, chlorine capsules, cleaning lotions, gloves, masks, dry foods, potable drinking water to different relief centres and also directly to flood affected homes. It was all done with the help and support of our neighbours, who went out of their way, to help the flood victims. Many of our volunteers worked day and night, sacrificed their time, energy and money to take the relief materials to camps and homes. We’ve now started making and collecting food kits consisting of items like rice, pulses, cereals and other essential items needed for a home and are planning to reach out to as many flood-affected families as we can through the help of our wonderful team of volunteers.

It was truly such an overwhelming sight to see everyone working together as one family to ease the pain of the flood victims. For many volunteers it was a moving and emotional experience, to meet the flood victims and interacting with them. Many came back and shared the tearful stories and experiences that they had heard in the relief camps. There is an old joke about Kerala, that Kerala is God’s own country but with devil’s own people. Well, after what has been happening for the last one week, I beg to differ, and I say it with much pride and joy that Kerala is truly God’s own country with God’s own loving people. And as Passionists, our community was also truly happy and glad to reach out to the crucified ones of our state in our own modest ways. May the Passion of Jesus be always in our hearts.

Fr. Johnson, C.P., Passionist Community, Cochin.
KRCR Annual Assembly 2018

Fr. Paul attended the annual assembly of the major superiors of Karnataka Region Conference of Religious (KRCR) in the month of August. It was held at ‘Prabodana’, the theologate of the Pallotines in Mysuru. The theme of the Assembly was *Religious Leadership: Innovative and Incarnational intervention.*

The innovative and incarnational leader is necessarily a disruptive leader who disrupts the existing and conventional ways (disruption), who kneels down to the level of the people he/she leads (humility), who feels into the people (empathy) and who heals the persons and the society (transformation).

During the assembly Fr. Paul was elected to the Executive Team of KCR.
Myanmar, 63rd and counting...

On the 15th of August 2018, I, together with Fr. Paul Hatta from Japan, Fr. Alexius from Indonesia and Fr. Gwen from the Philippines (PASPAC President) landed in Yangon the capital of Myanmar - on the feast of Mary's Assumption into Heaven, Independence day and also the day when St. Francis Xavier entered Japan.

We were welcomed at the airport by Rev. Fr. Maurice, the Executive Secretary of the CBCM (Catholic Bishop Conference of Myanmar), along with Fr Noah a Diocesan, who was assigned by the Bishop to coordinate our mission in Myanmar.

There are 42 religious Congregations in Myanmar and we will be the 43rd. The place we are planning to start our mission is in Pathein, which is around 160 kms from the capital Yangon. It’s in the district of Ayeyarwady. The Diocese of Pathien has only two or three religious Congregations and they are local congregations started by the earlier Bishops. We would be the first missionaries in the present time. In the mid 1950’s the French Missionaries (MEP) were in the diocese. The mission schools and properties were confiscated and nationalized by the army in 1960’s. It was a deadly blow to the diocese and for the MEP Missionaries. The present Bishop John Hsane Hgyi, has invited the Passionist mainly for the spiritual nourishment of the Clergy.

The country has witnessed civil war for the last six decades, many have lost their lives, displaced and have become refugees. It is in 2015 a democratically elected Government was put in place. Discrimination and oppression are slowly reducing, majority of the people in Pathein are either surviving on agriculture or fishing.

In the midst of the crucified ones of today, the Congregation of the Passion would serve as a spiritual force like Veronica to revive and strengthen, like Mother Mary to revitalize their Faith and to walk with them like Simon of Cyrene.

I will be returning on the 18th of September and the rest will be back on the 20th. Our new mission in Myanmar will officially begin on the 22nd of September 2018. Your Prayers will be the backbone of this mission.

Fr. Sony Marsilin C.P.

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